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ABSTRACT

This manual is designed to introduce educators to the basic issues in the implementation of a program for high school seniors featuring such options as elective minicourses, independent study opportunities, involvement of the student in community activities, and work-study programs. As created in Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School in New Jersey, the program makes use of open space teaching and the open campus concept. The manual briefly discusses needs assessment, planning, community involvement, and scheduling procedures as they apply to the program and describes project components and a few resource materials. (Author/PGD)

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AN ADMINISTRATOR'S MANUAL FOR THE SENIOR ELECTIVE PROGRAM

by
NEWTON BERON
Project Director

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Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School

RUMSON, NEW JERSEY

"On behalf of the Department of Education, State of New Jersey, I wish to bring the Senior Elective Program to the attention of educators throughout the nation. The program has made a significant contribution to the education of young men and women as they make critical choices for their future."

Fred G. Burke

Dr. Fred G. Burke
Commissioner of Education
State of New Jersey

EA 011 004

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With special thanks to Dr. Lillian White-Stevens, New Jersey Department of Education, Division of Research, Planning and Evaluation, Trenton, New Jersey.

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Introduction

This administrative manual is designed to provide a school system with guidelines to install and monitor a replication of the Rumson-Fair Haven Regional Senior Elective Program.

The Senior Program proves that students, faculty, administrators and parents are capable of designing and implementing a curricular plan which exposes students to traditional, practical and avocational courses; which gives students "breathing room" to function in and outside of a school building; and which offers students the option of independent learning.

The Rumson-Fair Haven Regional Senior Elective Program was developed, implemented and evaluated over a three year period from 1971 through 1974. It is presently in operation. The program was developed to mesh with a new building wing under construction. It was to help counteract student and teacher apathy and excessive absenteeism. Since a great number of students were to enter institutions of higher learning after graduation, the new curriculum was to ease student transition by providing an open climate for independent learning as well as course offerings not normally pursued in a traditional secondary school.

The Senior Program offers high school students many curricular alternatives. To students who complete their high school requirements in three years a combination of the following options is offered for their senior year: mini-elective courses, independent study projects, preceptorials, community involvement and a work-study program. To others, a combination of traditional subjects and the options mentioned are available. The Senior Program is conducted in an open space building. An open campus policy allows seniors to follow highly flexible schedules based upon a modular scheduling procedure. The development, evaluation and dissemination of the Rumson-Fair Haven Senior Elective Program was a cooperative effort of the Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School District and the Office of Program Development, Division of Research, Planning and Evaluation, Department of Education, State of New Jersey, with funding through the New Jersey Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title III program. In 1974, the program was validated by the standards and guidelines of the United States Office of Education as successful, cost-effective, and expertable and approved for national dissemination by the Dissemination Review Panel. Interested educators may make on site visitations by contacting the project director.

The Project Director

The successful leader of a program such as this should be strong-willed and secure, willing to take risks. He must share his decision-making power so that a feeling of ownership is generated among all of the groups involved in its development and implementation. He must give others responsibility and trust that they can get the job done well. He must try to:

- Gain staff, community and Board support.
- Give credit to those who make contributions to the program.
- Keep a positive outlook—minimizing those factors which are not really important to its success.
- Keep communications open and clear—assuming people do not know what is going on unless they are told.

- Learn to evaluate constantly, making adjustments whenever necessary.
- Be cognizant of any person or group who might help or hinder the project's success.
- Remember that the program is designed for students.
- Remember to do the best job possible at all times, taking credit for accomplishments and criticism for failures.
- Be alert to the fact that no one except the director really perceives the program as belonging to him.
- Involve teachers, aides, students, other administrators, parents and community leaders in important decisions.

PROCEDURES

Needs Assessment

Needs assessment is the first step in the development of a new educational program. It involves comparing existing curricula with new ideas and innovations.

Educational innovation is a slow process, for it creates many discomforts. Conservative parents feel that a traditional program, with its built-in controls and restraints, furnishes a safe educational environment for their youngsters. In order to break this "lock step" process, educators must demonstrate needs. They must produce hard data which show that their curricula does not work effectively and that a different procedure could, and in fact would, work better.

Gathering statistical facts which show an increase in absenteeism and tardiness as students progress from grade nine through twelve, demonstrates a need for curriculum changes which would keep students more involved with their high school work. Surveying student, faculty, and parent attitudes is another way of demonstrating needs. A questionnaire should be designed and sent out to alumni and parents. It should address itself to questions such as:

- Do you feel that the present high school experience prepares one for the "real world?"
- Do you feel that seventeen and eighteen year old students can handle more freedom?
- Would you allow your son or daughter the option of leaving the high school campus when not in class to do volunteer work in the community, seek part-time employment, or engage in an independent study activity?
- Assuming that your son or daughter has successfully completed what is considered traditional high school work, would you like to see courses such as Jewelry Making, Home Repairs, Ballroom Dancing, Auto Maintenance, Computer Technology, etc. be made a part of the high school experience? Would your child enroll in such courses? Which ones?

A questionnaire containing these items was designed by the Project Director at Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School and was sent out during the school year and then analyzed. It showed that an overwhelming number of graduates and parents were indeed in favor of an expanded curriculum containing avocational as well as practical courses. Most parents *were not opposed* to more freedom and most felt that the off-school options were a good idea.

Planning

Planning is a process of considering the step-by-step involvement of all of the appropriate groups needed to make the project a success. Needs assessment data should be tabulated and then given to each group—administrators, teachers, an advisory council, the Board of Education and students. The needs become the factors around which the program is developed. In the case of Rumson's Senior Program, they showed that students were apathetic as they approached their senior year, were interested in learning by direct involvement with independent activities, wanted to develop avocational pursuits to supplement their formal education, and desired more freedom and "breathing room." It is likely that students in other schools would have similar needs and interests.

Enlisting Community Leaders in an Advisory Council

The Senior Program assumes that twelfth graders are young adults capable of independent thought and action. It allows them the freedom to move in and out of the formal classroom, to use unscheduled time for socialization, study, community service work, etc. Students are seen leaving the building, working in local business establishments, using the public library and eating in neighborhood luncheonettes during unscheduled time. This concept demands public support, for some adults feel that structure and orderliness are synonymous with good education.

Power groups must be made to understand that giving students freedom is healthy. They must agree to grasp this idea as though it were their own, and to "sell" it to their constituents.

The Project Director should make a list of all community pressure groups, political, religious, professional, business, parental and educational. Leaders of these organizations should be identified and asked to join an advisory council. The purpose of this council should be to:

1. Gain an understanding of the program.
2. Interpret the program to their group.
3. Develop ownership of the program.
4. Create a climate of openness, sharing, honesty and communication.
5. Give advice when needed.

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The council should meet during the evening at regularly scheduled time periods. Notes should be kept recording the proceedings and sent to all of the members after each meeting has been concluded. Major decisions regarding the program should receive the approval of a majority of the council members.

Scheduling

Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School operates under a modular schedule of nineteen twenty-minute units per day, five days a week. No passing time is allocated between the units. Most traditional year-long courses meet four times a week in clusters of two or three modules in any one day, for a total of nine to twelve mods weekly, depending upon teacher requests. Senior mini-courses meet two or three times a week in similar clusters.

The school year is divided into five marking periods called facets, each running for a seven-week period. A one-week vacation recess is scheduled between the facets. Modular scheduling is not mandatory for the implementation of the Senior Program. However, schools which anticipate its adoption should stongly consider this time management plan. The flexibility that mod scheduling offers provides the schedule-maker with many possible time pattern options, and assures the production of a conflict-free matrix.

The time sequence for building the schedule is as follows:

1. January—Department chairmen and the curriculum coordinator decide upon courses to be offered for the subsequent school year. A curriculum brochure is written containing year-long traditional courses as well as mini-courses. It is distributed to all junior students at least two weeks prior to the time that they must make course selections for their senior year. After the students receive these brochures, an evening meeting is scheduled to which juniors and their parents are invited and the curriculum is described.
2. February—Students select courses for their senior year. The guidance staff reviews the selections and counsels those students whose selections seem illogical or in need of modification. Class tallies are then generated for all courses.
3. March—The schedule-maker meets with the curriculum coordinator and department chairmen to make teacher assignments.
4. April—Generation of master schedule begins.

The process outlined above is repeated for all grades. The schedule-making begins with the twelfth grade. Priorities must be decided upon. These include room utilization, homogeneous grouping (if important), time requests of teachers, laboratory availability, etc.

The scheduling procedure involves setting in time allotments for each course on student schedules, then assigning the course to a room on a room chart and to a particular teacher. Hand scheduling of classes assures control by the schedule-maker. Student and teacher schedules are completed during the summer and function for the first two marking periods, ending on the last school day in December.

During the month of November a list of mini-courses to be offered during marking periods 3,4 and 5 is prepared. It is designed empirically and contains time patterns and course descriptions. Year-long subjects remain constant—the mini-courses are built around them. Students are asked to select mini-courses which fit into openings on their schedules. A scheduling period is allocated for a date early in December, at which time students select mini-courses for marking periods 3,4 and 5. Preceptors, the senior guidance counselor, the project director and the schedule-maker assist in this scheduling

process, which operates in a manner similar to college scheduling, that is, each course is assigned a number and is given an allocation of class cards, one for each student. As courses are selected, students are given cards, and when the course is "filled" it is closed. This procedure has been in operation for three years and has been very well received by students and parents. Schools adopting the program might consider this scheduling procedure as it adds another dimension to the process—furnishing students and faculty with an experience not normally found in high school.

The Report Card

The implementation of the Senior Elective program caused a change in the report card format. Students received grades five times a year instead of four. Some courses, completed at the end of any facet, reflected final grades in the proper designated column. This instrument is shown below.

GRADE REPORT RUMSON - FAIR HAVEN REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL RUMSON, NEW JERSEY • PHONE 842 1597

STUDENT COPY

STUDENT'S NAME	GRAD YEAR	HOME ROOM	PRESENT SCHOOL TERM
Jones, Ann	1976	M 3	76

PARENTS NAME ADDRESS

Mr. & Mrs. John Jones
Rumson Rd.,
Rumson, N.J. 07760

EXPLANATION OF GRADING SYSTEM

P - PASSING
F - FAILING
A - OUTSTANDING
B - EXCELLENT
C - GOOD
D - FAIR
E - BELOW STANDARD
I - INCOMPLETE
H - MEDICAL EXCUSE
S - SATISFACTORY
U - UNSATISFACTORY
T - AUDIT

COMMENTS — SEE OTHER SIDE FOR EXPLANATION

TEACHER NUMBER	COURSE NUMBER	SUBJECT												CREDITS	
205	23501	EN 4 SY Co	A		B		C		B		A		C	B	5	0
625	64501	Ad MATH SR	B		A	1	C		C		A			B	5	0
920	93501	ECONOMICS	B		B		B		B		C			B	5	0
515	33501	FRENCH V	A		A		A		A		A			A	5	0
235	24201	GREAT WR	A		A		A							A	3	0
201	25206	Sr READ SR									P	1		P	1	0
615	69501	LOGIC	B											P	1	0
925	90501	HIS AM IND					A		A	1				A	2	0
945	91602	ABNOR BEHV									A	1	2	A	1	0
945	91704	CRIMINOL	A		A	1								A	2	0
945	92804	INT PHYCO					B	1	A	1				A	2	0
330	56101	JEWEL LAP	P		P									P	2	0
635	04902	SENIOR TA									P			P	3	0
330	56302	ADV JEWEL									P			P	1	0
720	41210	GPHYS ED12	P		P	1	P		P	1	P	1		P	3	0
														TOTAL CREDITS	41	

SEPT		OCT		NOV		DEC		JAN		FEB		MARCH		APRIL		MAY		JUNE		TOTALS	
ABS	TARDY	ABS	TARDY	ABS	TARDY	ABS	TARDY	ABS	TARDY	ABS	TARDY	ABS	TARDY	ABS	TARDY	ABS	TARDY	ABS	TARDY	ABSENT	TARDY
				1		2		1								1				5	0

PROJECT COMPONENTS

Mini-Courses

The Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School developed approximately ninety mini-courses over a four-year period, most of which are offered at the present time. A Resource Compendium containing brief course outlines is available. Complete courses of study have been published in Business, Industrial Arts, Social Studies, English and the Sciences. These courses, in booklet form, may be purchased from the Project Director and include such subjects as:

Income Tax, Stenoscript, Jewlery and Lapidary, Students and the Law, The American Indian, Stocks and Bonds, College Composition, Horror and the Supernatural, Mythology, Astronomy and Genetics.

The selection of subjects for mini-course development was a joint effort of faculty

and students. An attempt was made to match student interests with faculty expertise, a process which should be considered by any school attempting to replicate the program and to develop courses for its own needs. If possible, some courses should be "meaty," others should be intellectual, and still others should be "fun," perhaps hobby-oriented. Carry-over subjects such as Dancing and Bridge for Beginners are excellent ideas.

Preceptorials

A great deal of credit for the success of the Senior Program must be given to the teaching staff. Their efforts as instructors, advisors, and preceptors, sometimes over and above their teaching of normal complements of traditional classes, have expanded the program and lent direction to students. Their preceptor roles are prime examples.

Preceptorials are the ties which bind the senior program. They are homeroom units, teacher advisorships, seminar groups, and behavioral modification clusters which give direction and guidance for the independent study phase of the program. Ten teachers serve in this capacity, each responsible for thirty students. They meet with their students for a ten-minute homeroom period daily, then divide the group into three parts, meeting each of them once a week for sixty minutes. The preceptors, project director and senior guidance counselor have a scheduled group session every week to consider on-going problems. Homeroom is held during a ten minute mid-morning period and is compulsory for all seniors. Attendance is taken and announcements are read at this time.

Schools which anticipate adopting the preceptorial element of the Senior Elective Program should seek for this role well-adjusted teachers who are willing to direct students and counsel them, rather than control their behavior. These teachers must be comfortable with the fact that as students are given more options and more freedoms, they are apt to make mistakes in judgment—a factor in "growing up."

Rumson-Fair Haven Regional was able to allow some of the preceptors to participate in Basic Human Interaction courses, which proved to be invaluable. Schools considering the program should offer their staff training in this direction. The National Training Laboratories, Institute for Behavioral Science, is an excellent source for consultation help.[1]

Early in the school year preceptors concentrate on gaining rapport with their

[1]National Training Laboratory, National Education Association, 1201 Sixteenth Street, Washington, D.C.

students and help them to identify a project for independent investigation. Students may choose to do a formal research project; work in a skill, art, craft or music area; perform a community service activity, such as volunteer work in a hospital, day-care center or the local elementary school; or do part-time work. There are no formal guidelines for this phase of the program. However, it must be clearly thought out and described by the student to the precept group before it is approved. Preceptors serve as "big brothers" to their students. They handle minor behavioral problems, excessive absences, tardiness and cutting. They like to think of themselves not as disciplinarians, but as student advocates.

Independent Study

Independent study projects offer students opportunities to pursue activities not normally possible in high school. This element of the Senior Program has been expanded to include volunteer community work or part-time employment. All seniors must complete a project whose scope meets with preceptor approval. Progress reports are required periodically during the winter and spring and a final report must be made to the entire precept group prior to graduation. During the last several years students have written musical scores, learned to play instruments, completed paintings, made stained glass exhibits, tutored the retarded, organized team sports, wrote intellectual research papers, worked in hospitals, were employed by lawyers, and engaged in a myriad of part-time jobs. About fifty percent of the class was able to earn enough money to defray their first year college costs.

Independent Study has some "not so obvious" benefits which are worthy of consideration. Student activities are visible to the adult population, who become involved in supervision, are the employers, consultants, etc. These adults assume the roles of supporters for the program, or at the least advocates for this phase of it. Schools situated in or around urban areas have a wealth of agencies, businesses, industries and resources available for lending support, help and employment. The community becomes the school house, and a wealthy schoolhouse it is.

Seniors are responsible for selecting their independent activity, whether it be research, a part-time job, or community service. Preceptors serve as consultants in this endeavor, and at times may make suggestions for modifying or expanding it. Most often, however, students are left to their own devices.

Open Spaces and Open Campus

Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School was fortunate to have designed a program to mesh with a building that was under construction. The building is a two-story structure containing a large commons, office facilities, five large open-space learning areas, and a seminar room. Schools anticipating the adoption of the senior program may not be so fortunate. Open spaces are not necessary for its success, however, for all courses can be taught in traditional classroom settings. A lounge or commons area, where students can relax and socialize, is advisable. Some schools which have successfully adopted the program have modified existing areas to provide this facility, such as alcoves in hallways, traditional classrooms, portions of auditoriums, and the like.

Open campus, a philosophy which allows seniors mobility to come and go in and out of the school as long as they attend their classes, has been in effect since the senior program's implementation. It has given seniors greater responsibility for their actions, and taught them to use, or in some cases misuse, their unscheduled time.

Potential adopters should note that there has not been wholesale abuse of open campus. About five percent of the seniors each year abused this freedom, probably a smaller proportion than occurs in a traditionally scheduled school.

Evaluation

Student disinterest and apathy are of growing concern among educators. Such apathy is usually quite noticeable in the senior year, especially after students have received notification of admission to an institution of higher learning or have made job or career plans. In some schools, the extent of student boredom and apathy is so severe that the value of formal education during the last half of the senior year is questionable. The Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School has provided students with a demonstrable alternative to the conventional senior high school program of studies. The problem, therefore, is to determine whether this alternative program as it exists at Rumson, or perhaps at any other school adopting it, is significantly more effective in increasing student participation while not decreasing cognitive or self management skills.

Dr. Bruce W. Tuckman and Mr. Thomas Hill, staff members at Rutgers University and evaluation specialists, designed a plan for measuring the effectiveness of the program. Their plan, which compared random samples of students from Rumson with students chosen from two similar kinds of high schools, showed that the Senior Elective Program is truly alternative, that students think as critically there as they do elsewhere, are more comfortable in their educational surroundings, are more involved with the community, and achieve as well as others, particularly in the social studies.

The evaluators conducted their tests using two standard measures of learning, the STEP test for Social Studies and the Watson-Glaser Test for Critical Thinking. They also designed instruments which measured satisfaction with self and school, and with community involvement. The evaluation process was done after the program was implemented, a process which could be changed by an adopting school. It would be preferable to administer such instruments prior to the adoption, and then again after the adoption and implementation. Copies of the actual instruments designed for the evaluation may be obtained from the project director.

Cost

Schools who wish to adopt this program need spend very little money. Mini-course outlines may be purchased from the Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School at minimal cost. Others are available through the ERIC resource bank.

Preceptor training, though not essential, would enhance the effectiveness of these staff members. The most reasonable way of obtaining this service would be through the National Training Laboratory (see footnote #1), whereby one of their leaders would work at the district's site in the summer or perhaps over a vacation period during the school year.

A district wishing to educate their staff in alternative teaching styles may wish to use the services of Muska Mosston[2] and his staff. His text, *Teaching From Command to Discovery*, offers instructors a variety of stances particularly useful in an open space setting. His training involves micro teaching in all of the styles and critiquing them through video-tape. Mr. Mosston may be reached through the New Jersey Department of Education, 225 West State Street, Trenton, New Jersey 08625. The cost for this program would vary with the number of staff members to be trained and the length of time for which the services would be used.

Summary

The educational philosophy of the Senior Elective Program is based on providing seniors the freedom to develop self-discipline and responsibility for their own educational growth. The program was designed by students and faculty, has been operational since 1972, and has proven to be viable and effective. It is a process-oriented project, demanding philosophical changes. It is easy to adopt for it demands little or no training. However, it does take commitment on the part of a school and its administrative staff to make it a success, for it is experimental, innovative and non-conventional.

The rewards from such a program are refreshing. Students become independent, learn to handle freedom, generate interesting projects or do excellent community service activities. Most of all, learning becomes student initiated rather than teacher oriented.

[2]Muska Mosston, *Teaching From Command to Discovery*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., Belmont, California, 1972.

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